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Self-Concordant Goal-Striving as Internalized Motivation: Benefits Beyond Person-Goal Fit

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People benefit when their goals are self-concordant, i.e., when their conscious goals fit (or express) their implicit motives and inclinations. Self-concordance/fit is typically operationalized via a relative autonomy index (RAI), derived from self-determination theory (SDT). However, SDT research suggests that autonomous motivation may have other benefits going beyond fit, based on internal resolve to do what is necessary. In 2 studies we randomly assigned participants to pursue either an achievement or an affiliation goal. As in past research, rated self-concordance was greater when the assigned goal fit the participant's measured achievement or affiliative dispositions. As a new finding, self-concordance was also greater when the assigned goal fit the participant's just-expressed goal preference. Most importantly, rated self-concordance predicted goal satisfaction and positive expectancy even after controlling for the significant fit effects, which we interpret as internalized motivation effects. The same pattern occurred for an alternative measure of self-concordance based on the goal's fit with the true self. Discussion considers how such internal resolve may sometimes work against fit, by helping to entrench people in suboptimal goals.

Keywords: self-concordance, goals, internalized motivation, motive-matching

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The self-concordance model of goal-striving (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon, 2014; Sheldon & Holberg, in press) asks: "When people choose goals, do they manage to choose well?" The model assumes that selecting goals is largely a system 2 process (effortful, conscious, and hopefully rational; Kahneman, 2011), meaning that it involves producing verbal goal-statements about "what we think we want." Such statements are explicit motives, influenced by peoples' theories about themselves and the nature of the good (Emmons & McAdams, 1991). In contrast, implicit motives are automatic behavioral preferences (McClelland et al., 1989), which rule peoples' behavior much of the time (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). Implicit motives often target social incentives such as achievement, affiliation, or power, and are typically pursued nonconsciously and without thought. Implicit motives can be viewed as system 1 phenomena (automatic, nonconscious, and intuitive).

Much research operationalizes system 1/system 2 congruence in terms of the computed difference between an explicit and an implicit measure of the same motive (Schultheiss et al., 2008). Such research shows that peoples' implicit and explicit motives can be quite inconsistent or discrepant, as permitted by the fact that implicit and explicit measures of the same motives barely correlate (McClelland et al., 1989). Illustratively, a particular person might have a high need for achievement according to the stories they project into ambiguous pictures ("the woman is working late to meet her goals"). But they may have a less than average need for achievement according to their self-reports ("No, I do not care much about achievement"). Such a person is discrepant; their consciously expressed motives do not well express their implicit motives. This schism may negatively affect their mental health (Brunstein et al., 1998).

However, self-concordance research takes a different approach to measuring system 1/system 2 discrepancies, based on peoples' ratings of why they are pursuing goals (Sheldon & Holberg, in press). Such research draws from Self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2017) and its relative autonomy continuum (Ryan & Connell, 1989). According to SDT, self-determined behaviors are those pursued for intrinsic reasons (in which the behavior is interesting and enjoyable) and identified reasons (in which the behavior is important and meaningful, even when it is not enjoyable), more so than for external reasons (in which the behavior is done mainly to get a reward or avoid punishment) and introjected reasons (in which the behavior is done mainly to avoid guilt and self-recrimination). The first two reasons are called autonomous motivations and the second two reasons are called controlled motivations. Autonomous and controlled motivations typically correlate negatively, and often a "relative autonomy index" (or RAI) is computed by subtracting controlled from autonomous motivations.

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In this article, we consider three different interpretations and potential sources of variance in RAI scores: Goal/Implicit Motive Fit, Goal/Explicit Preference Fit, and Internalized Motivation/Existential Resolve. We explore how the first two types of fit predict RAI scores as well as how all three potential sources of fit predict goal-relevant outcomes.

Rated Self-Concordance as an Index of Goal/Implicit Motive Fit

Self-concordant goals research typically uses an RAI methodology to assess fit between the goal and the deeper person, operationalizing fit as the preponderance of autonomous goal motivation over controlled goal motivation. The basic assumption is that, although people cannot know their system 1 implicit motives directly, they *can* know how they feel about what they *think* they want (Sheldon, 2014). Feeling very controlled (and not at all autonomous) in pursuing a particular goal symptomizes a mismatch between the explicitly stated goal and the person's deeper inclinations and propensities.

Numerous experimental studies have supported this assumption, by randomly assigning people to pursue goals of one type or another. When a person is assigned a goal type that mismatches their implicit or broader motives, then they feel less autonomous and more controlled in pursuing such goals. In contrast, when the assigned goal matches the person's implicit or broader motives, then they report greater autonomy and less control. This effect has been shown for multiple goal-typing systems, including the distinction between agency versus communion orientations (Sheldon & Cooper, 2008), intrinsic versus extrinsic values (Sheldon et al., 2015), achievement versus affiliation motives (Sheldon & Schüler, 2011), and egocentric versus ecocentric goals (Sheldon et al., 2020).

Rated Self-Concordance as an Index of Goal/Explicit Preference Fit

In this research we also considered goal/person fit in a second way: as matching between the participant's just-expressed goal preference, and the type of goal they are then assigned. If they just chose X, but were then assigned Y, how did they feel? This approach defines fit as matching between the assigned goal and the consciously expressed goal-choice, rather than fit between the assigned goal and the habitual motive disposition. To our knowledge, the second type of fit has not been researched before, at least not in relation to measured self-concordance and goal outcomes.

How do the two types of goal-person fit relate to each other? We would expect a positive correlation, as people should tend to explicitly choose goals that match their assessed motives (Sheldon, 2014). However, this correlation may not be large as some might expect, given that self-concordance research shows that sometimes, people do not really want what they chose. Mainly, this second measure of fit allowed us to test our hypotheses in a second, somewhat independent way.

Rated Self-Concordance as an Index of Internalized Motivation/Existential Resolve

The self-concordance model interpretation of the RAI score, i.e., that it assesses the degree of fit between goals and other aspects of the person, is rather nonstandard within SDT. More typically, a high RAI for doing a behavior is viewed as an index of the degree of internal (or internalized) motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to SDT's "organismic integration minitheory," people have a natural propensity to internalize what they are doing—to develop greater ownership of, and increasing identification with, their own behaviors (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Supporting this proposition, people tend to develop greater ownership of formerly extrinsic motivations, both in the teen-age years (Ryan & Connell, 1989) and across the life span (Sheldon & Kasser, 2001) – developing a sense of freely choosing to do a behavior, even if it is onerous or ill-fitting. Internalization is viewed as a healthy process because it allows people to willingly do that which requires doing, gaining emotional and self-regulatory resources in the process (Ryan & Stiller, 1991). Internalization is also an *active* process, in which people build arguments to support the internalized behavior and work to further incorporate the behavior into their identity (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

This interpretation of the RAI, as a measure of internalized motivation despite the possible absence of desire, raises an intriguing possibility: that the self-concordance measure may have residual positive effects upon goal satisfaction and expectancies even after the objective fit part of the measure has been statistically extracted. In line with the active internalization concept, rated self-concordance may in part reflect a "make the best of it" attitude, a realization that one should stand behind one's stated (or assigned) goals, even in cases where one might have lingering reservations about them. Such an attitude might be said to reference an existential perspective on thriving—that being a mature and successful person requires us to embrace our choices and assignments and to enact them in good faith (Sartre, 2003). Rather than stewing over what to do, like Hamlet, we should get on with things.

Our main research hypothesis was that the established self-concordance measure, based on an RAI, taps *both* objective person-goal fit, as shown in past self-concordance research, *and* internalized motivation and resolve, as shown in past SDT research. This internal resolve comes from having psychologically accepted a goal, independently of its fit. Supporting the idea that such acceptance occurs and affects self-concordance, Sheldon et al. (2019) asked participants to rate goal self-concordance both *before* selecting among six candidate goals, and *after* choosing just three of them. They found that the three chosen goals were rated as more self-concordant after selection compared to before selection, and that these changes benefited participants, helping them to implement the goals. In terms of Gollwitzer's (2012) action phases model, asserting ownership of just-chosen goals may help people "cross the Rubicon" from deliberation to implementation. In the current research, in which self-concordance was assessed after goal-assignment, we assume that a similar process might provide benefits not explainable by goal/person fit alone.

Research Design

In both studies herein, we first assessed participants' achievement motivation (study 1) or their achievement and affiliation motivation (study 2). Then we asked participants to choose either an achievement or an affiliation goal, to rate in the next part of the survey. Then we assigned them to think about and pursue only one of these two goals, regardless of what they chose. In study 1 all participants received an achievement goal to think about, whereas in study 2 participants were randomly assigned to either an achievement goal

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or an affiliation goal. In both studies, this created both matched and mis-matched conditions, of two different types: either the assigned goal matched the participant's measured motive dispositions, or it didn't; and, either the assigned goal matched the participant's expressed preference, or it didn't.

Hypotheses

Our first study hypothesis was that when the assigned goal-type matches participants' motive dispositions, there will be higher rated self-concordance. This would replicate the experimental studies described above, which showed that being assigned a motive-fitting goal predicts a higher RAI for the goal.

Our second hypothesis was that when the assigned goal matches the participants' expressed preference, there will also be greater self-concordance. This would be a new effect, but not a surprising one: it would show that when people get the goal they asked for, it evokes feelings of goal-ownership.

Our third hypothesis was that both types of person-goal fit would predict positive outcomes, measured as satisfaction with the assigned goal, and as positive expectancies regarding the goal. If people are assigned a goal that matches their motives, or if they are assigned a goal of the type they just picked, they should feel more satisfied about that goal, and more optimistic about obtaining it.

Our fourth and most essential hypothesis was that, even after the two objective "fit" variables were accounted for, the self-concordance RAI would still have additional positive effects on outcomes. We reasoned that whatever the new goal, people can still benefit if they assert autonomous ownership of it. This might help them get started, even if they later change their minds based on what they learn.

Study 1

Method

Participants and Procedure

This study was reviewed and approved by the University of Missouri – Columbia Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection. Participants were 441 introductory psychology students at University of Missouri – Columbia, who took a semester pretest survey to help fulfill a class research participation requirement, during a preset window of time. The survey also contained other measures besides ours, submitted by other labs and investigators, which we ignored (the full survey can be found in the online supplemental materials). One hundred and fifty participants were men and 284 were women, with 5 "genderqueer" and 2 "other." The median age was 19; 368 of participants were white/Caucasian, 25 were Asian or Pacific Islander, 51 were Black or African American, 28 were Hispanic/Latino(a), 2 were Native American or American Indian, and 7 were "Other" (some participants checked more than one category).

The survey block first measured participants' achievement motivation, then presented them with a dichotomous choice between either a provided achievement goal ("trying to do your best to excel in some task") or a provided affiliation goal "(trying to have a rich social life and many friends"). This choice was presented with the instruction "which type of goal seems to best fit with your personality, that you are willing to answer a few questions about, in the next section?" Sixty-six percent of participants selected the achievement goal and 34% the affiliation goal.

Next, all participants read "Because we need balanced responses across the two types of goals, you have been randomly assigned to answer questions about just one of them - the Achievement Goal. Please answer the questions below even if you didn't actually pick Achievement goals to think about." Of course, there was no actual random assignment; this was a cover story. Then, participants rated their felt self-concordance for the provided achievement goal. Finally, participants read "Suppose you were to keep thinking about the goal you were assigned (achievement or social) and tried to make more of it happen in your life, in the next couple of weeks. Please rate your agreement with each statement below." These instructions were designed to move participants across the Rubicon, from a deliberative to an implemental frame of mind (Gollwitzer, 2012). The provided statements assessed participants' general satisfaction with that goal, and their positive expectancies about whether they would attain the goal.

Sensitivity Analysis

A sensitivity analysis was conducted using G*Power Version 3.1.9.7 software. This analysis reveals the minimum detectable effect size, given our sample size and using an 80% power threshold, for hypotheses 1 and 2 to be Pearson's r = .13. Hypotheses 3 and 4 required a minimum effect size of Cohen's f^2 = .018 to be reliably detected in our sample.

Measures

Need for Achievement. We used the Unified Motives scale (Schonbrodt & Gerstenberg, 2012), which asks "which motives are most important to you?" The scale includes three achievement items (e.g., "maintaining high standards for the quality of my work"). The items were administered with a 5-point scale. We averaged the items to create a need for achievement score (see Table 1 for alpha coefficients).

Self-Concordance. Participants read "Think about the goal you were just assigned, Achievement. Why would you pursue such

Table 1
Study 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (N = 441)

Variables	*M* (*SD*)	α	1	2	3	4
1. Need for ach	4.13 (.66)	.76				
2. Picked ach goal	.66 (.47)	—	.27			
3. Self-concord	.79 (1.3)	.74	.17	.15		
4. Satisfaction	5.11 (1.3)	.92	.39	.48	.25	
5. Expectancy	4.06 (.73)	.70	.38	.18	.18	.43

Note. Ach = achievement. All correlations significant at the .001 level or more.

a goal, at this point in time?" They were presented with eight statements condensed from the Comprehensive Relative Autonomy Index (Sheldon et al., 2017). Two statements were provided for each of four motivations: external (e.g., "because of external reward or incentives it will bring"), introjected (e.g., "because I would feel guilty if I didn't"), identified (e.g., "because it is something I value and find important") and intrinsic (e.g., "because it would be interesting or fun"). Participants rated these items on a one (not at all for this reason) to five (completely for this reason) scale. As in past research we computed a relative autonomy index, representing self-concordance, by adding the intrinsic and identified items and subtracting the external and introjected items.

Satisfaction With Goal and Positive Expectancy. We measured satisfaction with the assigned goal via three items (e.g., "How pleased are you with the goal you were assigned?") as in previous decision satisfaction research (Kim et al., 2020). We measured positive expectancies via two items (e.g., "I would attain this goal"). The satisfaction items were administered with a 7-point scale and the expectancy items with a 5-point scale.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 contains descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables. All correlational results exceeded the effect size threshold indicated by our sensitivity analysis, suggesting that we were adequately powered to detect these effects. Supporting hypothesis 1, need for achievement was positively correlated with rated self-concordance for the assigned achievement goal. This is consistent with past goal-motive matching research (Sheldon & Holberg, in press). In addition, need for achievement was also positively correlated (point-biserial *r*) with choosing the achievement goal, and with satisfaction and expectancy for that goal. Supporting hypothesis 2, having picked the achievement goal was also positively correlated with rated self-concordance for that goal. Supporting hypothesis 3, both need for achievement and having picked the achievement goal (i.e., the two measures of "fit") were positively correlated with the two outcome variables. Consistent with hypothesis 4, measured self-concordance was also positively correlated with the outcome variables.

We conducted two three-step regression analyses to formally test our third and fourth hypotheses. In these analyses either goal satisfaction or goal expectancy were regressed on the predictor variables. Need for achievement was entered at the first step and having chosen the achievement goal was entered at the second step. Consistent with the "fit" concept and hypothesis 3, we expected these two effects to be positive and significant. Measured self-concordance was entered at the third step. Consistent with the "internal resolve" interpretation of the self-concordance measure and hypothesis 4, we expected self-concordance to have independent positive effects at the third step.

Table 2 contains these regression results. In the goal satisfaction analysis, need for achievement was significant at the first step. At Step 2 achievement goal selection was also significant, and the need for achievement coefficient remained significant. These two coefficients demonstrate the "fit" effect upon outcomes, in two different ways (hypothesis 3). At Step 3 measured self-concordance was significant. This residual effect, controlling for fit, represents the posited internal resolve effect (hypothesis 4). Upon converting the resulting ΔR^2 to Cohen's f^2 effect sizes, all of these results exceeded the minimum threshold suggested by the sensitivity analysis and thus we were adequately powered to detect these effects.

In the positive expectancy analysis, need for achievement was significant at the first step. At Step 2, achievement goal selection did not reach significance, and the need for achievement coefficient remained significant. At Step 3 self-concordance was significant, again supporting hypothesis 4. While the effect size at Step 3 was large enough to be easily detectable given our power, the Step 2 regression result was below the effect size threshold indicated by the sensitivity analysis (Cohen's $f^2 = .007$). Therefore, hypothesis 3, concerning the effects of having selected the assigned goal, cannot be fully verified with respect to the outcome of positive expectancy, though the result is consistent with our other findings and expectations.

In conclusion, study 1 provided good initial support for our study hypotheses. Participants high in need for achievement, or who selected achievement as their preferred goal to consider, rated the assigned achievement goal as more self-concordant. Both goal/motive fit and goal/choice fit predicted at least one positive outcome, but even after controlling for these effects, the self-concordance RAI also had significant effects on the positive outcomes. SDT explains this as due to internalized motivation, operating independently of fit.

Table 2
Study 1: Results of Two Three-Step Regressions Testing Hypotheses 3 and 4

	Dependent measure					
	Goal satisfaction			Goal expectancy		
Model steps	β	ΔR^2	*p*	β	ΔR^2	*p*
Step 1		.149	.001		.141	.001
nAch	.396		.001	.376		.001
Step 2		.152	.001		.007	.001
nAch	.279		.001	.353		.001
Ach selection	.404		.001	.084		.066
Step 3		.021	.001		.012	.001
nAch	.258		.001	.337		.001
Ach selection	.387		.001	.071		.119
Self-concord	.148		.001	.114		.011

Note. nAch = need for achievement; Ach selection = the P picked achievement goal; Self-concord = self-concordance.

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Study 2

This study was similarly reviewed and approved by the University of Missouri – Columbia IRB prior to data collection. In study 2 we attempted to replicate and extend the study 1 findings. The study design was essentially the same, except that we added several new features.

First, rather than assigning all participants the achievement goal, we randomly assigned participants to either the achievement goal or the affiliation goal. What was a cover story in study 1 became the reality in study 2. Second, we measured the need for affiliation as well as the need for achievement. This was logical given the study's focus on both types of goals.

Third, we introduced a new measure of "fit" between person and goal. Specifically, we asked participants to rate the extent that the assigned goal expresses their "true self" (Schlegel et al., 2009). Like the self-concordance measure, such feelings may also provide only an indirect measure of fit, given that the measure is based on peoples' explicit ratings rather than objective matching of the assigned goal to their motive dispositions or expressed choice. Still, much research shows that when people feel their true self is being expressed, they gain emotional and functional benefits (Kernis & Goldman, 2006), which are like the benefits of rated self-concordance. Making decisions that are perceived as being consistent with the true self seems to be important for decision satisfaction (Kim et al., 2022; Schlegel et al., 2013) and meaning in life (Schlegel et al., 2011). Much of the work in this area has taken a social–cognitive approach and focused on how true self effects may be driven by a widely endorsed lay theory that suggests people *should* follow their true self as a guide in decision making (Kim et al., 2022). According to this perspective, the belief that one is following their true self as a guide may be consequential regardless of whether there is truly any such thing as an underlying true self (Rivera et al., 2019). We tested the same hypotheses with this measure as were tested with the self-concordance measure, including the idea that felt true self may capture aspects of both fit and internal resolve. We also evaluated which subjective fit measure (the SDT-based RAI or the true self measure) might be a stronger predictor of positive outcomes, venturing no predictions.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were 220 students in an upper division class at University of Missouri – Columbia, 77 men and 141 women (with 2 "other"). The median age was 18 and 185 of the participants were white/Caucasian, 11 were Asian or Pacific Islander, 27 were Black or African American, 11 were Hispanic/Latino(a), and 4 were "Other" ($2). Participants completed an online survey like the one used in study 1, the main difference being that the assigned goal was randomized. The study was open for a predefined window of time, and we took all participants who responded within that window.

Sensitivity Analysis

The sensitivity analysis given our sample size and an 80% power threshold revealed a minimum detectable effect size for hypotheses 1 and 2 to be Cohen's $f^2 = .036$, hypothesis 3 to be $f^2 = .044$, and an effect size threshold for hypothesis 4 to be $f^2 = .036$.

Measures

Need for Achievement and Need for Affiliation. We again used the Unified Motives scale (Schonbrodt & Gerstenberg, 2012), which asks "which motives are most important to you?" In addition to the need for achievement items ($\alpha = .80$), participants also rated the three need for affiliation items (e.g., "Have a close, intimate relationship with someone"; $\alpha = .80$). The same response scales were provided as before. Because study 2 relied on a contrast between achievement and affiliation, for economy we created an achievement minus affiliation difference score (for a similar procedure see Sheldon et al., 2007). We will call this variable "relative need for achievement." For the reader's information, treating the need for achievement and need for affiliation variables separately yielded essentially the same pattern of results, while introducing unnecessary complexity.

Self-Concordance. We used the same eight items as in study 1, this time worded to refer to the specific type of goal participants had been assigned (achievement or affiliation). We again computed a relative autonomy index, representing self-concordance, by adding the intrinsic and identified items and subtracting the external and introjected items.

Satisfaction With Goal and Positive Expectancy. We used the same items to measure these two "outcomes" as were used in study 1.

Connection of Goal With True Self. For this new measure, we employed two items, administered with a 5-point scale: "How much is your 'true self' consistent with this goal?" and "How much does this goal express who you really are?" We averaged the two items.

Results and Discussion

Table 3 contains descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables. As can be seen, being assigned one's chosen goal was again positively correlated with rated self-concordance for that goal. It was also correlated with true self and goal satisfaction. Self-concordance was positively correlated with true self and with both satisfaction and expectancy. True self was also positively correlated with both satisfaction and expectancy.

Next, we conducted stepwise regressions to formally test our four hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 stated that people feel more self-concordant when they are assigned motive-matching goals. To test this, we regressed measured self-concordance upon the type of goal assigned (achievement or affiliation) at Step 1, relative need for achievement at Step 2, and the product of these two variables at Step 3. We expected to find a significant positive interaction at Step 3, based on the difference in the correlations of the need for achievement variable with self-concordance in the assigned affiliation goal condition ($r = -.36$, $p < .001$) versus the assigned achievement goal condition ($r = .20$, $p = .03$). The interaction was indeed significant ($\beta = .92$, $p < .001$). We then conducted the same analysis predicting true self. Relative need for achievement was negatively correlated with true self ratings in the affiliation goal condition ($r = -.35$, $p = .001$) and positively correlated with true self in the achievement goal condition ($r = .25$, $p = .004$), which was a significant difference as indicated by the interaction effect tested at Step 3 of the regression ($\beta = 1.03$, $p < .001$). These results support hypothesis 1. Effect sizes in this series of regression

Table 3
Study 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (N = 220)

Variables	*M* (*SD*)	α	1	2	3	4	5
1. Need for ach	05 (.95)	.80					
2. Got chosen goal	.48 (.50)	—	.08				
3. Self-concord	.44 (1.46)	.77	−.05	.33**			
4. True self	4.67 (1.47)	.70	−.01	.33**	.53**		
5. Satisfaction	4.70 (1.40)	.91	.03	.38**	.51**	.82**	
6. Expectancy	3.92 (.80)	.92	.03	−.02	.32**	.42**	.39**

** $p < .01$.

models exceeded the minimum threshold for detection suggested by our sensitivity analysis, indicating adequate power to detect such effects.

To test hypothesis 2, that people feel more self-concordant when they are assigned goals of the type just selected, we tested similar regression models. When predicting self-concordance, the interaction between expressed choice and subsequent assignment was positive and significant (β = 1.46, $p < .001$). This reflected the fact that picking achievement was positively correlated with self-concordance in the assigned achievement goal condition ($r = .29$, $p = .001$) but negatively correlated with self-concordance in the assigned affiliation goal condition ($r = -.40$, $p < .001$). When predicting true self, a similar pattern emerged (β = 1.48, $p < .001$; rs = .27 and −.40, respectively). We were adequately powered to detect all effects for hypothesis 2. These results (fully presented in the online supplement materials) show that both types of fit (motive disposition/assigned goal matching and expressed choice/assigned goal matching) are associated with both indirect ways of measuring fit (via the self-concordance RAI and via the true self ratings). For the reader's information, no significant interaction effects emerged between the relative need for achievement and achievement goal selection in predicting self-concordance or true self. This is unsurprising given that this two-interaction effect did not consider which of the two goals participants were concretely assigned.

To test our third and fourth hypotheses, we conducted stepwise regressions in which either satisfaction or expectancy was regressed upon the three main effects at Step 1 (need for achievement, achievement goal selection, and type of goal assigned). At Step 2 the two interaction effects tested were entered together, representing the two types of fit (hypothesis 3). Our third hypothesis required both effects to be significant. At Step 3, self-concordance was entered. Our fourth hypothesis required this effect to be significant.

In the goal-satisfaction analysis (see Table 4) the three main effects were nonsignificant at Step 1. Supporting hypothesis 3, the two expected interaction effects were both significant at Step 2. Supporting hypothesis 4, self-concordance was significant at Step 3. This is again consistent with the "internal resolve" interpretation of self-concordance, given that the motive- or choice-matching aspect of the self-concordance variable was statistically controlled via the interaction effects. All effects found exceeded the minimum effect size threshold indicated by our sensitivity analysis, suggesting that we were adequately powered to detect these effects.

Then we repeated the analysis, this time with the positive expectancy outcome (see Table 4). Once again, the three main effects were again nonsignificant. The need for achievement by assigned achievement goal interaction was positive and significant. However, the picked achievement goal by assigned achievement goal interaction was nonsignificant. Thus, only one type of fit, namely, motive/assigned goal fit, predicted positive expectancies in this analysis, only partially supporting hypothesis 3. More importantly, self-concordance was significant at Step 3, again supporting hypothesis 4. Again, all effects were larger than the minimum threshold indicated by the sensitivity analysis, indicating adequate power.

Next, we repeated the above two analyses, substituting true self as the predictor at Step 3 instead of self-concordance (see Table 5). Notably, only Step 3 is different between Tables 4 and 5. In both analyses, true self was significant at Step 3. These results suggest

Table 4
Study 2: Regression Results for the Two Dependent Measures With Self-Concordance as the Step 3 Predictor

	Dependent measure					
	Goal satisfaction			Goal expectancy		
Model steps	β	ΔR^2	*p*	β	ΔR^2	*p*
Step 1		.014	.382		.003	.882
Assigned achievement	−.100		.144	−.024		.724
Need for achievement	.053		.463	.016		.827
Achievement selection	.020		.785	.041		.574
Step 2		.203	.001		.043	.093
Assigned Ach × nAch	.949		.001	.722		.001
Assigned Ach × Ach Selection	1.179		.001	−.451		.156
Step 3		.129	.001		.106	.001
Self-concordance	.400		.001	.364		.001

Note. nAch = need for achievement; Ach selection = the P picked achievement goal.

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Table 5
Study 2: Regression Results for the Dependent Measures With True Self as the Step 3 Predictor

	Dependent measure					
	Goal satisfaction			Goal expectancy		
Model steps	β	ΔR^2	*p*	β	ΔR^2	*p*
Step 1		.014	.382		.003	.882
Assigned achievement	−.100		.144	−.024		.724
Need for achievement	.053		.463	.016		.827
Achievement selection	.020		.785	.041		.574
Step 2		.203	.001		.043	.093
Assigned Ach × nAch	.949		.001	.722		.001
Assigned Ach × Ach Selection	1.179		.001	−.451		.156
Step 3		.490	.001		.201	.001
True self	.760		.001	.487		.001

Note. nAch = need for achievement; Ach selection = the P picked the achievement goal.

that the true self measure is like the self-concordance measure in its relevance to both "fit" and "internal resolve." Notably, the true self effects in Table 5 were larger than the self-concordance effects in Table 4, suggesting that the true self may be a stronger predictor of the two outcome variables than self-concordance. We were well-powered to detect these effects.

In conclusion, study 1 replicated almost all the study 1 results, using a more sophisticated experimental design with true random assignment, which predicted (and found) interaction effects rather than main effects. It also extended the pattern of results to a second indirect measure of person/goal fit, based on feelings that the goal expresses one's true self.

General Discussion

In this research we proposed a novel extension of self-concordance theory: that feeling self-concordant (i.e., autonomous) in one's goals can reflect both fit (the goal matches one's motives and preferences) *and* a sense of internal resolve, in which people assert identification with their chosen (or assigned) goal, whether the goal matches or not. Motive/goal fit represents a depth-humanistic conception of optimal functioning, in which one's goals express (or fail to express) deeper parts of one's organism. In contrast, internal resolve represents a more existential conception of optimal functioning, in which one takes responsibility for one's choices, even in the face of uncertainty. In two studies, we tested this idea by randomly assigning people to goals that either matched or mismatched their measured motive dispositions and stated preferences. Then we assessed their felt self-concordance for the assigned goal, in addition to assessing satisfaction and positive expectancies for that goal.

We found good support for all four of our hypotheses. In both studies, both types of objective matching predicted self-concordance, i.e., rated autonomous goal motivation. The motive disposition findings (hypothesis 1) replicate earlier experimental results, while the expressed preference findings (hypothesis 2) may be new in this literature. Also, both types of objective fit predicted greater goal-satisfaction and expectancies (hypothesis 3), as expected.

Most importantly, rated self-concordance still predicted satisfaction and expectancy even when both types of fit were accounted for in the equations. These results support our notion that asserting autonomous motivation has benefits that go beyond the fact that such motivation typically accompanies objective matching. They also suggest that even if a person has not managed to select good-fitting goals (or has not been assigned good-fitting goals, as in a work task perhaps), they still gain positive resources by asserting ownership of the goals. Consider a participant high in need for achievement, who picked the achievement goal to think about. To their dismay, they were assigned an affiliation goal instead, "to balance the study." In rating "why will you be pursuing this affiliation goal?," many participants might still say they it is because they identify with it and expect to enjoy it, even though this may not be completely true, at a deeper level. As a result, they are still likely to experience the benefits of greater satisfaction with this goal and the expectancy that they will succeed in attaining it.

We also found the same pattern of effects for a second indirect measure of self-concordance, based on the assigned goal's perceived alignment with one's "true self." This measure assesses peoples' self-reports of person-goal fit even more directly than the relative autonomy measure, which merely asks whether people expect to enjoy and identify with the goal. In our data, the true self measure had even stronger effects than the usual self-concordance measure. This is perhaps explained by the fact that perceived alignment with the true self affords a particularly satisfying decision-making narrative (e.g., McAdams, 2001). A true self narrative also suggests a particularly agentic role in decision making (Kim et al., 2020). When we decide by following our true self, we believe we have eschewed external pressure and looked within ourselves for the right answer. Felt true self effects may then be driven both by their overlap with self-concordance and by the additional meaning-making benefit that comes from the compelling narrative that the true-self-as-guide lay theory provides. Future research should continue comparing the two assessment approaches.

Our findings have interesting implications. For one, they explain how people might keep on pursuing mis-fitting goals, doing reasonably well despite the lack of fit. This may lead them into deeper entanglements and commitments regarding such goals, making it ever more difficult to back out and start over. Unfortunately, starting over (or disengagement; Wrosch et al., 2003) may sometimes be necessary for the person to reach their highest possible levels of fulfillment and happiness (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2021). By stubbornly persisting in what they said they would do, people with resolve may entrench themselves in suboptimal goals, a fact which may ultimately work against their development (Sheldon, 2014).

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Our data suggest that it is best if people both manage to select the "right" goals (organismic congruence) *and* manage to assert strong resolve regarding those goals (existential fortitude). Having just one or the other condition, or neither condition, was less optimal according to our findings.

Study limitations include our focus on just one basic motivational dichotomy, i.e., that between achievement and affiliation goals. Results would be strengthened by considering other dichotomies, such as between agentic and communal orientations (Sheldon & Cooper, 2008) or between egocentric versus ecocentric goals (Sheldon et al., 2020). Still, it seems likely that the current results would replicate in such tests. Another study limitation concerns our reliance on an explicit measure to assess achievement and affiliation motives. Results would be bolstered if implicit measures were used, so that discrepancies between implicit motives and goals could be directly computed (Schultheiss et al., 2008). Notably, however, Sheldon et al. (2015) employed implicit measures, finding similar motive-goal matching effects upon rated self-concordance. A third study limitation concerns the fact that our studies were cross-sectional and were all conducted online without direct monitoring. Results would be bolstered if the processes documented herein were shown to have longer-term effects over time, and if they were observed in a more controlled situation. Still, much self-concordance research has employed longitudinal designs, almost always showing long-term benefits of striving for goals that express self-concordant motivation (Sheldon, 2014). Also, the effects observed were in line with what could be detected by our designs and sample sizes, i.e., small to moderate.

In conclusion, this research has identified two related abilities that help people pursue their goals: the ability to select goals that fit one's motives and preferences, and the ability to feel autonomous in goal-pursuit even when the goals do not fit one's personality. We suggest that "fit" is ultimately more important than "internal resolve," because resolve may work against a person's well-being in the long-term, by prolonging ill-suited engagement. Longitudinal research will be needed to test this idea.

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